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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PROP](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: SUSPENSION OF "PRO-CHINA" REPORTER AT GERMAN
BROADCASTER SPARKS CRITICISM OF WESTERN "HYPOCRISY"

REF: A. OSC CPP20080902701002
[1](#)B. OSC CPP20080828968187

Classified By: Political Internal Unit Chief Dan Kritenbrink
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The suspension of a Chinese journalist from the German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle, allegedly for making public statements in defense of PRC policies, has been covered extensively by the Chinese official media amid charges of Western "hypocrisy" regarding press freedom (refs A, B). Li Changchun, a Politburo Standing Committee Member and China's propaganda czar, reportedly encouraged reporting of the story as a way to highlight the West's "double standards." The case resonates among some PRC reporters and intellectuals, contacts say, because of frustration over perceived anti-China "bias" in the Western media. End Summary.

GERMAN PRESS FREEDOM "A JOKE"

[1](#)2. (U) China's official media has devoted significant coverage (refs A, B) to the suspension of Zhang Danhong, the deputy director of the Chinese language service of German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle. According to PRC media reports, Zhang was suspended in August after she made public comments supportive of Beijing's Tibet policies and critical of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's approach to China. In reporting Zhang's suspension, Chinese newspapers have also highlighted the firing of Dieter Klaus Hennig from a German sports news agency, also allegedly because of his "pro-China" bias. A strongly worded commentary published by the official Xinhua News Agency August 29 said the "suppression" of "pro-China reporting" proved "Germany's freedom of expression was merely a joke. What is more worrying is that anti-China sentiment may be hiding in the shadow of Nazi racism."

CHINA'S PROPAGANDA CZAR "PERSONALLY INTERESTED"

[1](#)3. (C) Zhou Qing'an (strictly protect), a professor at Tsinghua University's Center for International Communication Studies and a frequent editorial contributor to Beijing's Xinjing Bao (The Beijing News) newspaper, told PolOff October 28 that Politburo Standing Committee Member Li Changchun, who is in charge of China's propaganda apparatus, took a "personal interest" in Zhang Danhong's plight. In a high-level meeting with propaganda officials, which Zhou said he learned about from his editors at Xinjing

Bao, Li Changchun reportedly stressed that China's media should pay special attention to the case and use it to highlight "Western hypocrisy" and "double standards" regarding free speech. Ironically, Li's interest in the Deutsche Welle reporter put Chinese propaganda leaders in an awkward position, according to Zhou, because Zhang Danhong was involved in the 1989 Tiananmen democracy movement, eventually seeking permanent residency in Germany as a result. Zhou speculated that Li Changchun must have been unaware of Zhang's background.

14. (C) Soon after Li Changchun's expression of interest in the Deutsche Welle controversy, Zhou Qing'an said his editors at Xinjing Bao asked him to write an editorial about the case. A version of Zhou's editorial was printed October 7 in the Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao), a nationalistic international affairs paper run by the People's Daily, and again in the People's Daily itself October 8. Zhou complained, however, that editors at the Global Times and People's Daily "heavily altered" his original piece, changing "800 of the 1200 characters," to make it more "hard-line." Zhou said his original comments alluding to the need for China to also respect freedom of speech were cut. When Zhou protested, he was told that it was "an honor to have an article printed in the People's Daily." While Zhang Danhong's case presented an attractive opening for China to protest "media bias" overseas, many Chinese do not understand that, as a state-run broadcaster, Deutsche Welle is not representative of Western media as a whole, Zhou

BEIJING 00004292 002 OF 002

remarked.

FRUSTRATION WITH WESTERN MEDIA "BIAS"

15. (C) Other contacts were highly skeptical that high-level leaders such as Li Changchun had actively promoted coverage of the Deutsche Welle story, instead arguing that the PRC media would "naturally" be interested in a story highlighting "anti-China bias." For example, Chen Hao (protect), the Editor-in-Chief of the International Herald Leader (Guoji Xianqu Daobao), a paper run by the Xinhua News Agency that has also covered Zhang Dandong's suspension, said the Chinese media's interest in the story was "spontaneous" and not the result of propaganda directives. Unlike most Western journalists, Chen said, Zhang Dandong works in Chinese language media and has an audience inside China. (Note: Chinese authorities do not censor Deutsche Welle as aggressively as they do the Voice of American and Radio Free Asia. With the exception of some sensitive periods, such as the anniversary of the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, Internet users in China can readily download Deutsche Welle podcasts.) While Chinese journalists are well aware of the limited press freedoms in their own country, Chen said, they nevertheless feel frustrated by anti-China "bias" in the Western media. This sentiment, Chen asserted, has prompted the local media to keep Zhang's suspension in the news.

STORY RESONATES AMONG "LEFTIST" INTELLECTUALS

16. (C) Wang Chong (protect), an international affairs columnist for the Communist Youth League paper, the China Youth Daily, said that, while he was personally unaware of any direct involvement by propaganda czar Li Changchun in generating coverage, the fact that the People's Daily reported the Deutsche Welle story indicated that "high-level leaders felt it was

important." While "average Chinese do not care" about Zhang's suspension, Wang said the story has nevertheless gained a great deal of attention among journalists and "leftist intellectuals" who are eager to denounce the West's "false" ideals of freedom of the press.

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